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CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

LARGE ECONOMY SIZE

This month, many readers of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY are receiving a "large size" mailing. Do not let this discourage you or lead you to overlook many of the enclosures. Think of what a bargain you are getting!

You will certainly want to make use of the suggestions for Church and Economic Life Week and the Race Relations Sunday Message; nor can you afford to delay to make your plans and order your supplies for February's Month of Emphasis opportunities.

Last year, Miss Gwen Bilstad of Madison, Wisconsin, sent us an excellent idea which was too late to be included among our suggested plans. Her proposal was that all church dinners held during Brotherhood Week might use the table mat, *Mission in Brotherhood* (1½c), the leaflets *Our Most Precious Asset: Educated Youth* (free) and *Memorandum on Race Relations Department* (1c), all available from the Congregational Christian Missions Council. In addition, there might be placed in each church several copies of books relating to brotherhood, such as *Mission in Brotherhood.*

It seems to us that this excellent suggestion might be extended a bit farther so that at any church dinner or function during the month of February similar use be made of other social action and race relations materials. *1934-1959: A Quarter Century of Social Crisis,* our new leaflet for the month of emphasis, last year's leaflet *One In Faith and Action,* Council for Christian Social Action table mats (1½c from the Missions Council), and other items might well be displayed for sale or given away as souvenirs.

If you come across any new, fresh ideas which you have put into effect, let us know so that we can pass them on.

THE SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE GROWS UP

By John B. Forsyth

Committees on Christian Social Action have been common enough in area and national church bodies for some years. Such committees in local churches, one suspects, have been much less common. It is almost certain that only a minority of local churches of any denomination have such a committee which truly functions.

And yet the serious business of social education and social action depends heavily on the work of such committees. Without a group to spearhead these interests little is likely to happen in the congregation.

Five Steps

Experience over a considerable span of years has convinced me that certain steps are essential if a social action committee is to come to birth and achieve maturity.

1. The committee has to become "official." It must have recognition in the eyes of the people as an agency of their church. It must have an agreed right to explore social questions, to make statements about these issues, and to recommend action.

Becoming official may mean a vote of the congregation at an annual meeting, or appointment by an official board, or even appointment by the pastor (if this is within his authority). The method will differ according to the church's polity and customs.

Such an official committee must be large enough to supply a good working "core," allowing for absentees at most meetings. Probably no committee should have fewer than five members, and a committee of more than fifteen might become unwieldy.

The committee should be broadly representative of the congregation. It should include both men and women; people in various age brackets; people in different occupations (a lawyer proves most helpful); and above all, people of diverse economic and political viewpoints.

2. The committee must grow into a working group. Modern studies of group life make it plain that calling a dozen men and women together for a meeting does not make them into a group. They do not know each other, and therefore they do not trust each other. Because they cannot trust one another, they cannot work effectively together. Achieving this mutual trust, which is one basis of a group's productivity, takes time, interpretation and patience.

In such a field as social action, people have to learn that differences of opinion are not shameful or embarrassing, but are the very stuff out of which we learn and grow. One committee reached an important milestone in its growth as a working group on an autumn evening preceding a Presidential election. Through conversation before the meeting was called to order, the members recognized that some among them were actively engaged in the district organization of the Republican Party, and others were doing precinct work for the Democratic Party. All gained a new ability to accept political differences and thus to work together.

If a committee makes a field trip to investigate some need or to do research on some problem, the members will grow toward becoming a working group. Informal social times serve the

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THE SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE GROWS UP

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same purpose, and experiences of worship together are essential.

3. The committee must educate itself. No social action group can hope to influence a congregation unless the members of it are themselves a study group, constantly seeking to understand issues better and to know what kind of action is possible.

The by-laws of one church say: "The social action committee shall study current economic and social problems as they affect the church and the community, and shall recommend to members of the congregation or the church itself appropriate Christian action with respect to such problems."

What Issues

What issues shall such a committee study? The field is broad. A checklist of local problems and national problems, submitted to the official boards or to the congregation as a whole, may help in deciding the problems on which the committee can give most practical assistance.

A social action committee needs to know the Biblical basis for its work. The minister can be a leader in Bible study which occupies part of each meeting and which helps the members to know the bearing of the Gospel on the problems of a given time and place.

Any social action committee can plan a program of study for itself. The social action magazines of several denominations may become the source of monthly reports by individual members, or a single issue may be selected for study throughout a season or a year. Material may include a presentation by a speaker from outside the church, a bibliography from the public library, and individual reports by committee members.

Another source of stimulus for a committee is the participation of its members from time to time in workshops and conferences. A church should be willing to pay the expenses of members at such meetings occasionally—on the understanding that those attending will make a thorough report to the committee or to the church as a whole, and that the insights gained will be used to benefit the church.

4. The committee informs the congregation. It can do this in a variety of ways. It can provide a literature rack for the narthex or lobby of the church building and can stock such a rack with appropriate pamphlets. A committee can make various helps available before each election to assist voters in evaluating candidates and in understanding questions to appear on the ballot.

If the church has a weekly or monthly paper, the committee can ask to have social action paragraphs or articles included from time to time.

A social action committee can sponsor a study course for adults on one or more social issues, perhaps during the season of Lent.

A committee can offer to help build programs on social issues. I recall a "United Nations Month" which a social action committee sponsored during October. This project was put into the church calendar a year ahead. All groups with programs were asked to have a United Nations program during October, and the committee offered its help in arranging such programs. Articles appeared weekly in the church paper throughout the month. The minister was asked to preach one Sunday on the United Nations. A literature exhibit on U.N. was prepared. All these emphases and activities together made a profound impact on a large congregation. The secret was early planning and careful execution of the plan.

5. The social action committee stimulates action. A committee has the right to recommend action by individual members of the congregation. Committee members may not say, "We represent the official opinion of our church," unless they have taken a vote at a meeting of the congregation. But a committee may well say, "We have studied this question carefully. In our opinion, certain things should happen. We urge members of the congregation to register their convictions upon this question with our representatives in Congress." This does not commit the church to a position. The committee speaks only for itself, which it has always a right to do.

Sometimes a committee can create such interest in a problem that a special group is appointed by the church to take action. Thus the responsibility passes out of the hands of the social action committee, which can then turn its attention to other matters. One committee developed interest in a program for older adults until a special group was created to plan such a program. Another committee urged the adoption of a family of displaced persons until this project was undertaken by the church as a whole.

A social action committee may well seek contributions from individuals in the congregation for special purposes—legal action to secure justice in a racial issue, financial aid for a social project threatened by organized opposition, or funds to relieve an emergency human need.

No member of a social action committee should be discouraged because the committee seems to do very little at any one meeting, or because only one project is completed in a whole year, or because some members of the congregation seem reluctant to accept the committee. The early stages in any committee's life are slow.

With wise guidance, with patience, and with genuine Christian love, a group of diverse individuals will come to feel their unity, will sense the importance of their mission, and will persistently educate themselves as they seek to lead the congregation. Perhaps one could express it by saying that "the first five years are the hardest!"

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SOCIAL ACTION CALENDAR

January 18-24—Church and Economic Life Week.

February—United Church of Christ Month of Emphasis on Christian Social Action.

February 3-6 — Churchmen's Washington Seminar, Washington, D. C.

February 5-7—Council on Christian Social Action, Buck Hill Falls, Pa.

February 8—Race Relations Sunday.

March 31-April 2 — United Church of Christ Washington Seminar.

July 1-5—General Synod, Evangelical and Reformed Church, Oberlin, Ohio.

July 5-9—General Synod, United Church of Christ, Oberlin, Ohio.

July 9-11 — Council for Christian Social Action, Oberlin, Ohio.

OUR CONGREGATION USES FEBRUARY—

The United Church's Month of Emphasis on Christian Social Action

The following suggestions for focusing attention on our task in society during February, designated as the month for special emphasis on Christian social action, are adapted from the revised and enlarged *Church Program and Budgets Builder,* published by the Missions Council and the Department of United Promotion. It suggests three aspects of congregational planning in which the committee on Christian social action, the church council or consistory, and the various organizations have their place.

I. WE CLARIFY OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose is to work together as Christians in response to God's call in Christ, to bring the gospel to bear upon our common life—in the home, in the community, in economic life, and in political relationships, both domestic and international. In our local church, this means organization, study and action toward the following aims:

1. To strengthen wholesome family life.
2. To discover, use, and support social agencies and movements which help to meet community problems.
3. To understand the social and economic problems of all groups in the community and work for justice and reconciliation among them.
4. To help Christians understand their responsibilities as citizens and fulfill them as voters, party members, policy makers, and office holders.
5. To fulfill the nature of this church as a part of the body of Christ, which is called to witness to God's will in all of life.

II. WE APPRAISE OUR PRESENT PROGRAM

1. Is our church helping to meet adequately the social and spiritual needs of the men and women, children and youth in our community? YES ☐ NO ☐
2. Is our church exerting an effective influence on the community . . . through the pastor's preaching . . . through his participation in community activities . . . through representation of the church on community councils and agencies . . . through the work of an official committee on Christian social action (or public affairs) which studies social problems and ways of meeting them . . . through the activities of lay members who use their vocational, social, and other associations toward these ends? YES ☐ NO ☐
3. Do we have members now using their skills and Christian influence in positions of leadership in public office or on community boards and agencies? YES ☐ NO ☐
4. Do we have persons whose interests and skills are *not* being utilized in church and community life? YES ☐ NO ☐
5. Do we have members active in volunteer work, such as helping with the Scout program or serving in hospitals or community centers? YES ☐ NO ☐
6. Do our members recognize the Protestant principle of "the priesthood of all believers" in doing their work and in making decisions in their various occupations? YES ☐ NO ☐
7. Do we have members who participate actively in labor unions and other vocational organizations? YES ☐ NO ☐
8. Does the church help its members to form convictions about Christian vocation and to follow them in their daily work? YES ☐ NO ☐
9. What actions have we taken, as individuals or as a congregation, contributing to the solution of state, national, and world problems? YES ☐ NO ☐
10. Which members of our congregation would be most effective as leaders in a program of social education and action?

III. WE PLAN SOME ADVANCES

1. Plan a series of sermons interpreting the relation of the Gospel to economic life, race relations, social welfare, and international affairs.
2. Conduct a study of such books as *The Bible and our Common Life, The Kingdom Beyond Caste, Mission in Brotherhood,* or the study packet *The Social Responsibility of Christians in Daily Work,* either in adult church's opportunity in the community.
3. Hold a series of Sunday evening forums on current social problems.
4. Make a special effort to bring into the life of the church persons from all racial and cultural groups living in the community.
5. Distribute *1934-1959: A Quarter Century of Social Crises, One in Faith and Action,* and other interpretive leaflets to all members and friends of the congregation.
6. Show a motion picture or a filmstrip to stimulate awareness of the community's needs and discussion of the church's opportunity in the community.
7. Send selected persons to the Churchmen's Washington Seminar or to other institutes conducted by the Council for Christian Social Action.
8. Study the needs of the community and how the program of the church may be related to them, using *A Manual for Christian Social Action,* the *Social Ministry of the Local Church, or Your Church and Your Community.*
9. Observe Race Relations Sunday, February 8, or plan an evening of inter-racial fellowship in which the congregation can participate.
10. Encourage members of the congregation to study a social problem such as foreign economic aid, and to express their convictions through letters to their congressmen.
11. Provide a subscription to SOCIAL ACTION magazine for the members of the social action committee and for the officers of the church; and/or order SOCIAL ACTION's attractive new display rack.
12. Send an offering, through the regular channels, for the general work of Christian social action or for the authorized special program in housing desegregation.

February is the "month of emphasis" when Congregational Christian members are requested to make special individual gifts for the work of the Council for Social Action, 289 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.

Gifts from Evangelical and Reformed Church members should be sent to the Commission on Christian Social Action, 2969 West 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio.

NEW FILMSTRIP ON DAILY WORK

The far-reaching consequence of seemingly simple decisions men and women make in the course of their daily work is graphically brought home in the discussion filmstrip, *The Biggest Thing in Middleville.* Prepared for the Department of the Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches and/cooperating denominations for use in the current coordinated Emphasis on "The Social Responsibility of Christians in Daily Work," the story is narrated on 33-1/3 rpm records.

The immediate decision is one made by Homer Livingston, owner of the Hold-It Company, and it concerns no one but himself — he thinks. But swiftly it becomes apparent that many people and many of the community's institutions are affected, even the church. How it is affected and what it does—well, that's the story. And what it means is for your men's class, and the married couples' group, and the Women's Guild to bite into afterward. It may be just the thing to give life to the social action theme you are using at your February church family night program.

The filmstrip with record sells for $12.50, or may be rented, from the Bureau of Audio-Visuals of the United Church. It may also be borrowed from Congregational Christian state conference offices which maintain promotional audio-visual libraries.

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News and Program Service of the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ
Ray Gibbons, Director
Huber F. Klemme, Associate Director and Editor

Sent free to pastors and social action committee chairmen. Group subscription, 10 or more to one address, 50 cents each. Individual subscriptions, $2 per year with SOCIAL ACTION upon request.

General communications and orders from Evangelical and Reformed churches should be addressed to the Editor, Council for Christian Social Action, 2969 W. 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio.

Congregational Christians should order from Council for Christian Social Action, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

The Council for Christian Social Action unites the work of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

WHERE TO GET HELP FOR "MONTH OF EMPHASIS" ACTIVITIES

Books, Packets, and Pamphlets referred to in the program suggestions on page 2 may be ordered from either office of the Council for Christian Social Action.

Films and Filmstrips. In the motion picture field, we recommend *A Train of Action* for a general introduction to local social action, *World Without End* on work of the United Nations, and *The Sound of a Stone* on the problems of freedom and community hysteria. For race relations, there are *Broken Mask, All the Way Home* (good on barriers to unsegregated housing), and *Levittown Story* (documentary on individual reactions *pro* and *con* coming of first Negro family into this all-white community). For a good new filmstrip see the adjoining article on *The Biggest Thing in Middleville.* All films and filmstrips should be ordered from the Bureau of Audio-Visuals of the United Church of Christ, 1505 Race St., Philadelphia 2, Pa.; 14 Beacon St., Boston 8, Mass.; 19 S. LaSalle St., Chicago 8, Ill., 870 Market St., San Francisco 2, Calif., or 1720 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis 3, Mo.

Speakers. Your own church and community may have people with special interest or training in problems of social welfare, race relations, international affairs, or economic life. Sometimes the conference or synod committee on Christian social action has a list of persons at home in these or other specialized fields who will come for a small honorarium or for no fee beyond expenses. There may be someone in your area who took part in a CCSA Seminar in Europe or Mexico who would present first-hand impressions, perhaps illustrated with kodachrome slides.

Above all, look through the back issues of SOCIAL ACTION for program suggestions, warshop materials, and articles that may start off a panel or a general discussion on a vital subject.

SOCIAL ACTION IN THE CHURCHES

The Vermont Congregational Conference held a social action workshop at its conference center, Atkinson House, Newbury, October 24 and 25. Planned by the State Social Action Committee, headed by the Reverend John F. Anderson, Barnet, there was discussion of such topics as "The Church and Social Action," "The Christian and His Daily Work," "Mental Health," "State Institutions," and "Integration." Mr. Allen Cutting, Deputy State Probation and Parole Officer, and Dr. Huber F. Klemme, Associate Director, Council for Christian Social Action, were among the leaders.

* * * *

United Congregational Church in Rochester, New York, recently held a unique "Mission Fair." Sponsored by various organizations in the church, it followed the theme "Windows on the World," and provided an opportunity for members and friends to learn about the total program of the church. Attractive booths were set up and manned by members of church committees who were there to assist anyone who wanted to ask questions about the exhibits.

The Fair started on the evening of United Nations Day, October 24, and continued over the week end. The opening feature was an after-dinner discussion on "My Part in a Christian World Order," led by the Reverend F. Nelsen Schlegel, Field Secretary of the Council for Christian Social Action, who was assisted by a panel composed of local social action committee members. This committee has led the congregation in a number of projects including work in a migrant camp near Rochester.

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The *Beacon,* parish paper published by the Euclid Avenue Congregational Church, of Cleveland, Ohio, this fall carried an article by the associate minister, the Reverend Donald C. Armstrong, on the Christian citizen's obligation to vote and to vote intelligently.

Pointing out that this calls for a thorough understanding of issues, candidates and parties, aided by diligent reading of newspapers and magazines presenting various points of view, he said: "Christians cannot complain about the evils of party politics if they are doing nothing to participate in the work of a party to see that it raises its sights and standards."

Richard Wager, Church Editor of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* carried a story with quotations from the article in his column, "Religion in Review."